

Ávarp Guðlaugs Þórs Þórðarsonar utanríkisráðherra

Arctic Frontiers í Tromsö, 23. janúar 2017

Madame Prime Minister, Ministers, Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen.

I am delighted to be here in Tromsö this morning at the Arctic Frontiers conference with the title “White Space – Blue Future”.

As it happens, this is my first engagement outside Iceland since I took office as Foreign Minister less than two weeks ago. And what is more natural for a new Icelandic Foreign Minister than to start with Arctic issues, here in the Arctic capital of our neighbouring Norway? I mention this to make the point that much of our heritage, customs and traditions were once shared by Iceland and Norway. More than thousand years later, this common experience fosters mutual understanding and respect, an important asset to have - both in a Nordic and Arctic context.

Given our common geography and dependence on natural resources, it is by working together that we are able to achieve more than we would otherwise. It is through close cooperation

we ensure that future development is managed in a responsible way.

Developments in the Arctic and Iceland's role in both managing and protecting it enjoys a broad political consensus and has been identified as one of the top priorities of our foreign policy.

Iceland's interests in the Arctic are manifold and pertain to protection of the region's vulnerable environment, sustainable economic development and utilisation of the natural resources, respect for international law, security and safety, infrastructure and connectivity, and, of course, cooperation with all involved stakeholders, including the indigenous people.

The significance of the Arctic on the international stage has increased substantially in recent years, by virtue of climate change and the subsequent debate on the exploitation of natural resources, territorial claims, social changes, new shipping routes, and so forth. We welcome the increased attention the Arctic is gaining and look forward to enhanced cooperation with Arctic and non-Arctic stakeholders alike, but at the same time we acknowledge that it is first and foremost the responsibility of the Arctic states to pave the way for a favourable and sustainable development of the region.

Iceland and Norway, by and large, share common interests in Arctic Affairs in general and in ocean and maritime issues in particular. And even if we do not always agree on everything, our collaboration is close, meaningful and neighbourly.

Protection and sustainable use of the ocean has received greater attention in recent years. Iceland particularly welcomes that the oceans have received special emphasis in the recently approved Sustainable Development Goals, as the oceans are, indeed, essential for global sustainable development. In Iceland, we had to put this into practice decades ago – as we largely rely on fisheries for our livelihood.

Climate change is one of the greatest threats to the ocean today. Increase of temperature and ocean acidification will put the entire marine ecosystem at risk. The only way to turn this around is by cutting greenhouse gas emission and Iceland has decided to take part in collective delivery with the European Union and Norway of 40% reduction of greenhouse gas emission by 2030.

Within the Arctic Council, the ocean affairs have also been high on the agenda, particularly under the current US Chairmanship of the Council. Iceland welcomes this emphasis and has contributed meaningfully to the ongoing discussion and work in this regard. We are also committed to continue this work

during the upcoming Finnish chairmanship. When Iceland assumes the chairmanship in 2019 we will presumably focus on issues close to our heart, such as seeking ways forward to maintain healthy, sustainable and productive oceans.

Ladies and gentlemen.

A conference like the Arctic Frontiers is an excellent venue for dialogue and collaboration. It is important that we continue this constructive cooperation for the benefit of our societies and peoples, and for the cause of a sustainable and viable development of the fragile and vulnerable Arctic. For centuries an inaccessible wasteland that is gradually opening up for increased human activities. Which may entail opportunities but it is also our responsibility to preserve this jewel for generations to come.

Thank you for your attention.